Neurodiversity Cultural Responsiveness: Improving Communication and Understanding

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Language Use

Identity First: “Disabled, Autistic”
✓ Grammatically correct
✓ Includes disability as part of person
✓ Embraces disability
✓ Many autistic people prefer identity first language

Person First: “Person with …”
✓ Awkward syntax
✓ Separates disability from person
✓ Shows a desire to be distant from disability
✓ Parents and professionals often prefer person first language

Listen or ask the person which they prefer if you find you need to use terminology.

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Avoiding Euphemisms

A mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing.
Ettie (she/her) @ettiebk · Jul 6

“Having a disability is not something to be ashamed of, and such euphemisms deny the existence of disability and reinforce the stigma surrounding disability rather than embracing it as a valued aspect of diversity” says #SayTheWord Campaign founder @AnjaliFP.

Anjali Forber-Pratt, Ph.D.
What is Neurodiversity?

Sociologist Judy Singer

- **Biodiversity** – refers to every living thing, including plants, bacteria, animals, and humans. Sometimes in a particular region or ecosystem.

- **Neurodiversity** – refers to the virtually infinite neuro-cognitive variability within Earth’s human population. It points to the fact that every human has a unique nervous system with a unique combination of abilities and needs.

- **Neurodivergent (ND)** – an individual who has a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards. (Or Neurominority)

- **Neurotypical (NT)** – an individual who has a style of neurocognitive functioning that falls within the dominant societal standards. (Or Neuromajority)
Neurodivergent Umbrella

Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, ADHD, Traumatic Brain Injury, Dementia, Autism, Tourette’s, Dysgraphia, Plus
Share Your Experiences & Current Practices
Neurodivergence as a Disability and as a Culture
“Neurodiversity is a property of the human population of Earth. While Neurodiversity itself is just an indisputable fact about the planet, the Neurodiversity Movement is something else again. It is built on the idea that just as conserving biodiversity is necessary for a sustainable, flourishing planet, so respecting neurodiversity is necessary for a sustainable, flourishing human society.”

Judy Singer

Reflections on Neurodiversity

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Disability Models

**Deficit / Medical Prescriptive Model**
- Seeks to “fix”
- Sees person as the problem
- Believes there is one “correct” or “typical” way of being
- Embraces cultural constraints

**Social Justice / Descriptive Model**
- Seeks to empower
- Sees barriers to access as the problem
- Believes there are many acceptable ways of being in the world
- Questions cultural constraints

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Disability Models on Campus

What does this look like on a college campus?

• Examples of Medical Model?
• Examples of Social Justice Model?
Definition & Impact: Autism

- Communication differences, especially in the use of nonverbals: using and understanding
- Sensory processing sensitivities
- Executive Functioning differences
- Motor and other processing differences
- Differences in socializing
- Innovative problem-solving skills

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Definition & Impact: ADHD

- Executive Functioning differences, including attention differences
- Some communication differences
- May complete work in unconventional ways
- Ability to hyper-focus
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyslexia (up to 15%)</th>
<th>Dysgraphia</th>
<th>Dyscalculia (up to 6%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Processes spoken language better than written word</td>
<td>• May use shorter sentence structure</td>
<td>• May use calculator for basic math facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• May use “flexible” spelling and grammar</td>
<td>• Pain and fatigue when hand-writing</td>
<td>• Can affect spatial awareness, sense of direction, and time perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learns from experiences</td>
<td>• May have illegible hand-writing, even to themselves</td>
<td>• Strong memory for printed word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to see the big picture</td>
<td>• Strong memory for details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Understanding the Autism Spectrum

The fluctuating levels of capability of neurodivergent people

By Rebecca Burgess
(Theoraah on Tumblr)
Co-occurring disabilities

- Non-verbal Learning Disability
- Auditory Processing
- Dyspraxia
- Executive Functioning variances
- Visual Processing
- Obsessive Compulsive Behaviors
- Expressive Language
- Prosody
- Anxiety, Depression
Like everyone, neurodivergent and autistic students and colleagues are handling a lot every day. Remember to check biases, remove barriers, and use the communication tools we’re covering soon!

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Potential for Bias & Understanding Barriers

Stereotypes
Ableism
Ability Privilege
Cultural Expectations
Stereotypes

Many things are believed about neurodivergent people:

• Savant / Highly intelligent
• Intellectually Disabled
• Prone to meltdowns and anger
• Rude, dislikes people
• No empathy
• Can’t make eye contact
• And more
Ableism

A system that places value on people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence and excellence. These constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence and excellence are deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics and capitalism.

This form of systemic oppression leads to people and society determining who is valuable or worthy based on people's appearance and/or their ability to satisfactorily produce, excel & “behave.” Importantly, you do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.

"Taking notes by hand helps you learn – you don’t need a note taker!"

a working definition by Talila "TL" Lewis
Ableism: Things To Consider

- Word / phrase choices
- Attitudes – over-helping, feeling uncomfortable, ?
- Inspiration Porn
- Activity choices
- Environmental barriers
Ugly Laws

“No person who is diseased, maimed, mutilated or in any way deformed so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object or improper person to be allowed in or on the public ways or other public places in this city, or shall therein or thereon expose himself to public view, under a penalty of not less than one dollar nor more than fifty dollars for each offense.”

Ability Privilege

Ability privilege is an advantage that someone has because they do not have physical or cognitive limitations on their daily activities and interactions.
Edward T. Hall, Cultural Anthropologist
Communications Styles and Rules:
- Facial Expressions
- Gestures
- Eye Contact
- Personal Space
- Touching
- Body Language
- Conversational Patterns in Different Social Situations
- Handling and Displaying of Emotion
- Tone of Voice

Notions of:
- Courtesy and Manners
- Friendships
- Leadership
- Cleanliness
- Modesty
- Beauty

Concepts of:
- Self
- Time
- Past and Future
- Fairness and Justice
- Roles related to Age, Sex, Class, Family, etc.

Attitudes toward:
- Elders
- Adolescents
- Dependents
- Rule Expectations
- Work
- Authority
- Cooperation vs. Competition
- Relationships with Animals
- Age
- Sin
- Death

Approaches to:
- Religion
- Courtship
- Marriage
- Raising Children
- Decision-Making
- Problem Solving
Communication Styles and Rules

Facial Expressions, Eye Contact
Conversational Patterns in Different Situations
Handling / Displaying Emotions
Tone of Voice
Notions of:
  Courtesy and Manners

Concepts of:
  Self, Time, Fairness

Attitudes toward:
  Work, Authority

Approaches to:
  Religion, Decision-making, problem-solving
Cultural Iceberg Potential Conflicts

Communications Styles and Rules:
Facial Expressions  Gestures  Eye Contact
Personal Space  Touching  Body Language
Conversational Patterns in Different Social Situations
Handling and Displaying of Emotion
Tone of Voice

Notions of:
Courtey and Manners
Friendship  Leadership
Cleanliness  Modesty
Beauty

Concepts of:
Self  Time  Past and Future
Fairness and Justice
Roles related to Age, Sex, Class, Family, etc.

Attitudes toward:
Elders  Adolescents  Dependents
Rule Expectations  Work  Authority
Cooperation vs. Competition
Relationships with Animals  Age
Sin  Death

Approaches to:
Religion  Courtship  Marriage
Raising Children  Decision-Making
Problem Solving
Life Example

Deep Culture
Cultural Rules are FLEXIBLE
Most Respectful Interpretation
- “Give the benefit of the doubt”
- Assume the best

Manage Your Stories
- Ask Clarifying Questions
- Re-word your statements

Own Your Boundaries
- Move or leave if needed
- Change yourself not others
Non-Verbal Communication

- Facial expressions
- Gestures
- Paralinguistics (tone)
- Body Language & Posture
- Proxemics (space)
- Eye Gaze
- Haptics (touch)
- Appearance
- Artifacts (objects)
- Humor

- Needing to “read between the lines.”
- This varies across cultures and within cultures.
- Unspoken, implied, or hidden meaning within spoken communication.
Share a **clear and kind** way to say these requests.

- Unmute, raise your hand or write in the chat.

1. You might want to think about changing this part.
2. Oh, hi, I was just leaving.
3. You’re very truthful!
4. I was hoping you could come to office hours.
5. The integrals still need to be done.
6. Please come to class prepared tomorrow.
7. Is that what you’re wearing?
8. Have you considered going to tutoring?
9. I was taught to say thank you when someone helped me.
Ways to Communicate

- Direct vs. Indirect
- Concrete vs. Abstract
- Logic vs. Emotions
- Detail vs. General

Position of sliders means nothing!
Social Communication
It's not a disabled dog
It's a cat
Neurodivergent People May Have...

- Differences in conversational language styles
- Excellent problem-solving skills
- Ability to hyper-focus
- A strong visual memory or need to record
- A need for others to reach out to include them
- High energy and drive
- A deep knowledge & enthusiasm in areas of interest and problem solving in general
- High empathy; possibly shown unconventionally
- Strong pattern-recognition and superior attention to detail
- Strengths and weaknesses along a continuum like everyone else

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Scenarios & Questions

• Providing feedback
  ✓ Timely
  ✓ Specific, direct
  ✓ Include positives
  ✓ Problem-solve

• Classes & Meetings
  ✓ Agenda ahead of time
  ✓ Participation options
  ✓ Follow-up notes to all

• Social Activities
  ✓ Accessible options
  ✓ Remember accommodations
  ✓ Allow opt-out or options
  ✓ Plan together

• Your Questions & Comments
Resources

- APA Grammar Style Guide: Disability
- Anjali Forber-Pratt, Ph.D. (#SayTheWord)
- Judy Singer: Reflections on Neurodiversity
- Autistic Self Advocacy Network: About Autism
- A Qualitative Investigation of Successful Adults with ADHD
- Wired Magazine: The Unappreciated Benefits of Dyslexia
- Dysgraphia: Hidden Talents Masked by a Learning Disability
- Dyscalculia in Adults
- Theoraah: Understanding the Autism Spectrum
- Social Communication Animated Video (Autistic at Work LLC)